

Technology Innovation Project



Project Brief

TIP 290: Modeling High-impact, Low-frequency Geomagnetic Disturbances using Magnetic Field Data from Solar-orbiting Spacecraft

Context

Research has found that solar g-modes are detectable from spacecraft measurements of solar wind. In helioseismology, g-mode or gravity waves are density waves which have gravity as their restoring force, hence the name "g-mode". Solar g-modes are oscillations that originate inside the Sun and can persist over thousands of years. Solar surface events such as flares and coronal mass ejections (CMEs) are thought to be driven by subsurface mixing processes, which implies a link between gravity modes and surface events. Flares and CMEs can in turn cause High-Impact, Low-Frequency (HILF) geomagnetic disturbances (GMDs) on Earth.

Therefore, detection of g-modes in the solar wind suggests that associated GMDs can be forecast six months or further into the future using spacecraft measurements.

Solar flares and coronal mass ejections (CMEs) cause changes in Earth's magnetic field when their trajectories intersect with Earth's own. In general, changes in magnetic fields induce currents in wires and in particular, changes in Earth's magnetic field induce currents in power lines. Large-enough solar flares and CMEs can cause an induced current strong enough in a power system that equipment damage and widespread service disruptions result.

The geomagnetic storm on March 13, 1989 resulted in the collapse of the Hydro-Québec power grid within 90 seconds, leaving millions of customers without power for as long as nine hours. The same storm caused tripping or failure of transmission equipment across North America. The cost of the March, 1989 geomagnetic disturbance was approximately \$13.2 million dollars in Québec alone.

Description

This proposal is focused on prediction of GMDs over a longer time horizon than is provided by NOAA and NRCAN. The goal of this project is to investigate the empirical relationship between geomagnetic disturbances at Earth and solar gravity modes (g-modes); if persistent g-modes can be used to predict the probability of geomagnetic disturbances in the future, then a predictive model would allow BPA to manage associated risks. The project aims to develop a forecasting method capable of predicting solar flare events and associated CMEs that will impact the Earth's magnetic field enough to affect power transmission services.

The first task will be to examine reconstructions of g-modes and observed solar flare events carefully to determine if there are any apparent correlations. If any correlations are found, the next step is to develop a prediction model that takes g-mode reconstructions as inputs and the probability of a solar flare event as an output.

In addition, examination of geomagnetic data at Earth may allow assessment of the magnitude of a HILF GMD with time horizons of greater than six months, providing some guidance as to what a worst-case scenario might be as well as when it is likely to occur. This type of forecasting is sometimes referred to as the "100-year problem."

Why It Matters

Providing more accurate predictive information on GMDs would allow BPA to improve its overall readiness for a such an event, which could include: allocate resources with increased efficacy; step-up time frames on power system upgrades or alter maintenance schedules that would allow the power system to be able to cope with a forecast GMD and subsequent geomagnetically induced current (GIC); or delay the rollout of new equipment until a forecast GMD has passed, potentially saving the new equipment from damage. Having probabilistic predictive forecasts of GMD events over an extended time horizon would also enable BPA to integrate the probability of various outcomes into their risk management framework when making strategic or long-term decisions, as well as operational decisions. This could reduce costs and increase system reliability over the long term.

Goals and Objectives

1. Obtain time series of g-modes from Ulysses and ACE satellite data and align g-mode measurements between satellites.
2. Determine and quantify the relationship between g-modes, solar flare events, geomagnetic disturbances, and power grid disturbances at Earth.
3. Build and test a predictive model for solar flares, geomagnetic disturbances, and power grid disturbances at Earth using g-mode time series from ACE and Ulysses satellite data.
4. Generate a forecast for BPA future use.

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Project Start Date: October 1, 2012

Project End Date: September 30, 2013

Funding

Total Project Cost: \$168,830

BPA Share: \$70,000

External Share: \$98,830

BPA FY2013 Budget: \$70,000

Reports & References (Optional)

Links (Optional)

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